

VZCZCXRO5113  
RR RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV  
DE RUEHAM #2231/01 2061337  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
R 241337Z JUL 08  
FM AMEMBASSY AMMAN  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3202  
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 002231

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/24/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: RESIGNATION OF NATIONAL CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS  
BOARD CHAIRMAN

REF: A. AMMAN 1984

[1](#)B. AMMAN 1455

[1](#)C. 06 AMMAN 6724

[1](#)D. 05 AMMAN 2826

[1](#)E. 03 AMMAN 1954

[1](#)F. TEXT OF JORDANIAN FIGURES' STATEMENT SLAMMING  
JORDAN'S ECONOMIC POLICIES (OSC  
GMP20080624632001)

Classified By: Classified by Charge d, Affaires Daniel Rubinstein for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Ahmed Obeidat, head of the quasi-governmental National Center for Human Rights, was recently asked to resign for signing a widely disseminated letter to the GOJ criticizing its economic reform and privatization program. Former Prime Minister Adnan Badran has been appointed as Obeidat's successor. End summary.

[1](#)2. (U) Jordan's quasi-governmental National Center for Human Rights (NCHR) was established in 2002. It has the mandate of facilitating Jordan's accession into international human rights conventions, and reporting on national developments related to human rights.

[1](#)3. (C) At least some of the Center's reputation for professionalism and effectiveness stemmed from the leadership of Ahmed Obeidat, who had served as Chairman of the Board since NCHR's establishment. Obeidat brought with him to the job impeccable East Banker establishment credentials; he was previously Prime Minister (1984 - 1985) and Director of the General Intelligence Directorate (GID; 1974-1982). At NCHR he built a reputation for seriousness; Atef al-Majali, a lawyer and NCHR staff member, told poloff on July 6 that Obeidat had extremely high standards for work, and demanded that any claims the Center made be backed by detailed research and factual evidence. Post contacts in civil society have broadly evinced respect for him.

[1](#)4. (C) Obeidat's exit occurred within the context of the mid-summer battle between the conservative establishment and the government over economic reform (ref a). Obeidat was one of 150 prominent Jordanians to sign a June 23 open letter to the GOJ criticizing the government's economic reform program, and arguing that privatization was leading to the "dismantling of the state" and had "been turned by the corrupt into an easy way to illegitimate wealth." The letter also linked increasing poverty in Jordan to privatization, and leveled veiled criticism at the GOJ for not being transparent enough in its handling of recent land sales.

[1](#)5. (C) The request for Obeidat's resignation coincided with the King's July 2 public response to the criticism, in which he reprimanded critics for rumor mongering and eloquently defended GOJ policy (ref a). Note: The Board Chairman and entire board are appointed by Royal Decree based on the Prime Minister's recommendations. The resignation request was reportedly delivered by the PM. End Note.

[1](#)6. (C) Obeidat has previously, and subsequently, taken

controversial anti-government stands. Political analyst Jamal Refai, former president of the Jordan Society of Human rights and a friend of Obeidat, said he was forced to resign from the Senate in 1994 after voting against that year's peace treaty with Israel and writing an opinion piece highly critical of Jordanian-Israeli relations. In 2003, Obeidat signed a letter asking King Abdullah to take a stronger stance against "U.S. aggression in Iraq" (ref e), and in 2006, he signed a petition asking the King to "reconsider" the peace treaty with Israel (ref c). Most recently, on July 21, Obeidat attached his name to a letter to King Abdullah asking him to pardon Ahmad Dagamseh, a Jordanian soldier convicted of murdering 7 Israeli schoolgirls in Jordan in 1997. Refai described Obeidat as somewhat of a hothead in a July 9 conversation with poloff. Refai argued that signing the June 23 letter was impolite and impolitic. "I respect (Obeidat), but he made a mistake. He has no right to address the King like that. This is not a case of freedom of speech," Refai asserted.

17. (C) The NCHR now faces an unexpected leadership transition. Former Prime Minister (2005) and current Senator Adnan Badran was appointed July 23 to replace Obeidat as Chairman. Dr. Badran is a U.S.-educated academic, and was formerly the head of Philadelphia University. Note: Badran was initially selected as PM because of his reform credentials and reputation for open-mindedness (ref d), and the National Agenda was composed during his tenure; however his term as PM was cut short by public unpopularity and the November 2005 Amman hotel bombings. End Note.

18. (C) Comment: We find NCHR reporting objective,

AMMAN 00002231 002 OF 002

uncensored, and critical. This makes it a rare institution in a country where self-restraint is the norm, and where most civil society groups lack the resources and political capital to report with precision. Foreign organizations are less constrained, but lack the indigenous legitimacy of NCHR. The question now is if Obeidat's tenure institutionalized a culture of effectiveness in the organization, or if its success was inextricably linked to his persona. Of further concern is NCHR's ability to retain its talented and idealistic staff, some of whom, contacts tell us, were on the verge of resigning out of solidarity with Obeidat. Badran too has excellent credentials, and will likely need to flex them if he is to fill his predecessor's shoes.

Visit Amman's Classified Web Site at  
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/amman>

Rubinstein